

# The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology:

## An Interview with the Editors

Interviewed, with introduction, questions, and conclusion

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The much-anticipated *Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology* (CDH) was officially launched in October of 2013, the culminating work of decades, with contributors from all parts of the globe.<sup>2</sup> It is the definitive reference work in the line of John Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*, featuring entries by and about authors, composers, and hymnological topics and resources that are covered nowhere else, and has been received with acclaim with reviews from the Netherlands to the United States.<sup>3</sup>

A detailed history of the project can be found on the CDH website, <http://www.hymnology.co.uk/> which outlines the long path of the project from the 1930s to the present, led by members of The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Previous editors have passed away in office, efforts have waxed and waned over the years, but now the CDH has established itself in the digital age with a clear sense of arrival.

The CDH's current editors, led by J. R. Watson and Emma Hornby, include music editor Jeremy Dibble, Australasian editor Colin Gibson, Canadian editor Margaret Leask, and American editor Carlton R. (Sam) Young. Because it is an online resource, it is designed to be updated semiannually; editorial work continues even now.

This article provides us the opportunity to hear from the editors themselves about the process of taking on the CDH, how it fits with other historical hymnological works, and the future of research in hymnology. Each editor was invited to respond individually to a set of nine questions; in the end, the editors chose to respond corporately and have provided their collective thoughts below.

### 1. How is the CDH different from other reference works in hymnology?

It is different in several ways. It is the first attempt since John Julian's *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (1892, 1907) to attempt a global survey of hymn writing, to provide what Julian called on his title page 'the origin and history of Christian hymns of all ages and nations'. There have been valuable reference works on the hymns of certain

countries and on hymnic traditions, for example, Johannes C. A. Zahn's *Die Melodien der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchenlieder*, six volumes (1889-1893); Cecilio McConnell's *La Historia del Himno en Castellano*, Third Edition (1987); Henry Wilder Foote's *Three Centuries of American Hymnody* (1940); and the *Dictionary of North American Hymnody* (1950-) consisting of draft essays and an in-progress bibliography of published hymns and songbooks now subsumed into [Hymnary.org](http://Hymnary.org); as well as many 'Companions' or reference books on individual hymnals, such as the German *Komponisten und Liederdichter des Evangelischen Gesangbuchs* and its accompanying *Liederkunde zum Evangelischen Gesangbuch*, or the American *The 1982 Hymnal Companion* edited by Raymond F. Glover and the companions to Baptist and Methodist books by William J. Reynolds and Carlton R. Young respectively. There are the books by Erik Routley: *A Panorama of Christian Hymnody*, revised by Paul A. Richardson, and *An English-Speaking Hymnal Guide*, revised by Peter Cutts. There are many other useful companions. But none of these has attempted anything like the coverage of world hymnody, the hymns 'of all ages and nations'. It was thought to be an impossible task. In 1992 Bernard Massey, the editor of the British and Irish *Bulletin of The Hymn Society*, described it as 'beyond contemplation, let alone completion'. We cannot, of course, claim to have covered every hymn that has ever been written in every country in the world. That would be a truly impossible task. But for over ten years we have endeavoured to emulate Julian by including the hymns that are still in use.

One of the first decisions that was made was to include tunes, which had been ignored by Julian's *Dictionary*. The first appointment that was made by J.R. Watson in 2002 was that of Professor Jeremy Dibble, the author of books on Parry, Stanford, and Stainer, and an expert on sacred music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Jeremy has been responsible for engaging a team of musical experts, and for writing many of the most significant entries himself (he was one of the two editors who appointed Dr Emma Hornby in 2003).

Not every hymn has a mention of its tune, because some are capable of being sung to many tunes and have never had a settled tune. We have, however, included information on the tune when it has been written specifically for the words, or the words for the tune; and many of the entries on composers contain information on the tunes and the hymns to which they were set. But whether the tune is mentioned or not, we are firmly of the belief that a hymn exists not just through its words but in the singing of those words.

The *CDH* is also different from other reference books in that it has not repeated what was written in Julian's *Dictionary* (some reference works simply reprint the commentary from it). We have commissioned new articles at every stage of the work and uncovered new facts at almost every point. Naturally we have drawn on earlier research, but we have sought to add something, or clarify it, or re-assess it in the light of the current cultural and religious scene.

## 2. What was the most difficult part of editing the *CDH*? What was the easiest?

Clearly the most difficult part was the scale and complexity of the work itself. It should be remembered that this has been a task, for British hymnologists anyway, that began with the foundation of The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland (now the HSGBI) in 1936. The founder members included some formidable scholars, and the principal aim of the Society was to be the production of 'Julian revised'. Millar Patrick, the Scottish expert on psalm tunes, was appointed as Editor: he went over to America in 1939 to enlist help, and (from accounts in the *Bulletin* of the Society) had a splendid time. But he resigned in 1948, his work unfinished (he died in 1951). His successor, C. S. Phillips, author of *Hymnody Past and Present* (1937), fell ill, and died in 1949. He was succeeded by an English Presbyterian minister, Leslie H. Bunn, who worked on it until his death in November 1971. He made notes on 720 hymns and 112 authors, mostly from British books, and these were typed up after his death by Arthur Holbrook. The idea was kept alive for a few years, but ended sometime in the 1970s with Holbrook's bad-tempered resignation. The only result of all this effort was the fascicle on Wesley hymns produced by Wilfrid Little and published by the HSGBI in 2003.

The task of replacing Julian's *Dictionary* is the Mount Everest of hymnology. We have looked back at Millar Patrick and the others, who all perished in the attempt, rather as Hillary and Tensing must have looked back at Mallory and Irvine and the others who had died on the mountain. Like those who first reached the summit in 1953, we have had better equipment than our predecessors. What has made all the difference is the invention of the computer. It is not easy to imagine how John Julian, writing letters to his contributors, and keeping their replies on slips of paper, ever managed to complete such a huge work. We have had e-mails, which made correspondence so much faster; and we have had

the internet, which was in many cases a source of instant information. Although some information on the internet is not to be relied upon, it can provide instant access to library catalogues (with dates of publication), and often access to the works themselves when they have been made available on-line. Even as we worked on the *CDH*, the situation changed year by year: this meant fewer visits to libraries and more and more solutions to problems by working on the screen.

Difficulties of course remained, as well as straightforward solutions. We are tempted to say that the most difficult part was dealing with authors whose work needed revision, or who insisted on re-writing work that they had already submitted; the easiest part was welcoming into the dictionary an entry that seemed to us to be well-written, well-informed, and complete. Another of the easiest and most fortunate steps was the transference of our voluminous files in 2009 to a website with the attractive and meaningful banner, which shows something of the wide range of coverage. It was the work of a young American, James Jirtle, then a postgraduate student finishing his Ph.D. in Theology. It contains hymn writers and composers from Martin Luther and Christian Fürchtegott Gellert to Darlene Zschech and Timothy Dudley-Smith, and is an emblem of the scale and range of the work. The final fortunate step was finding Carlton R. Young to take over the American side, where there had been difficulties. No praise can be too high for the way he has conducted the US editorship.

However, another difficulty was that of finding authors in the first place for topics that none of the editors was particularly familiar with; and there were some potential contributors who promised work which they failed to deliver, so that we had to start again. Another of the pleasures was inviting an author who would write back and say 'why, of course'.

The editors' worst nightmare was finding that an entry had been commissioned twice, and that the editors had on their desks more than one excellent article on a topic or an author. It happened very rarely – some half a dozen times in the course of more than 4,200 entries – but it was acutely embarrassing when it did happen (at one point we managed just in time to stop three entries being written on one figure). We had to appeal to the good nature and understanding of those who were affected by this, and we had some very gracious responses to our agonized appeals; and sometimes one of the two entries was by an editor, who was prepared to withdraw his or her attempt.

## 3. What areas needed the most attention in hymnological research since the 1907 edition?

The obvious first answer to this is that a great many hymnals and a vast number of hymns have appeared since 1907. Julian's second edition just managed references to the 1904 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and to the *English Hymnal* of 1906. But all over the world there have been new hymnals and new hymns of every language and every denomination. Julian commissioned

W. R. Stevenson's important, and unique for its time, essay on 'Missions, Foreign,' (pp. 738-759), but we have tried to include the religious song of peoples and nations known and unknown to him. We have been very fortunate to have Colin Gibson as Australasian Editor and Margaret Leask as Canadian Editor; and there have been some exceptionally willing and helpful contributors such as Michael Hawn, Werner Ewald, and Robin Leaver: Michael provided almost all of the African information, and Werner did South America, while Robin's expertise in Reformation hymnody, especially that of Germany, was invaluable. S T Kimbrough Jr. has provided the first-time coverage of North American Native American [First Nation] song.

Second, sometimes the entries in the 1907 edition have become out-dated. The one on Bunyan, for example, stated that 'this great allegorist cannot be included amongst hymn writers', although 'He that is down needs fear no fall' was found in a few books. The arrival of Ralph Vaughan Williams's tune MONKS GATE (initially for Percy Dearmer's 'He who would valiant be') made possible the singing of 'Who would true valour see', hobgoblins and all.

The third answer is that Julian's *Dictionary* was written at a very different time and for a very different audience. Julian must have believed that his readers shared his late-Victorian assumptions. There was little or no reference to social or political questions, or to the role of women (who in Britain had no vote until 1918), or to the environment. In addition, Julian was writing for a constituency, mainly (one supposes) clergymen and academics. He assumed that they would have been educated (in Britain) at one of the ancient universities, and that they would be familiar with Greek and Latin. For the most part he was very fair and broad-minded, but at one or two points his prejudices and assumptions are revealed. Of John Kent, who was a shipwright at dockyard at Plymouth, he wrote: 'his opportunities for acquiring the education and polish necessary for the writing of hymns were naturally limited'; of Daniel Sedgwick, the scruffy bookseller who knew more about hymns than anyone else in the nineteenth century, Julian's contributor wrote that he could not use his knowledge because of 'all the drawbacks of education, temperament, and narrow theological prepossessions', so that others with more knowledge could build upon his work.

#### 4. What areas needed the most attention since the edition completed by Arthur Holbrook in the 1970s?

Holbrook simply typed up Leslie Bunn's work, perhaps with the help of the secretary whom Bunn had been given. There are two copies in Britain, one in the Library of the Royal School of Church Music, the other in the Pratt Green Collection of the University of Durham. The typescript bears the imprint of The Hymn Society and the date of 1972, but there is no indication that it was ever published. The entries contain details of hymns in English and their authors, often bringing Julian's entries

up to date (Bunn went as far as the *Anglican Hymn Book* of 1965). This was called by Holbrook a 'fascicle', and he promised further fascicles on German hymns and on the Wesley hymns. The latter was eventually completed by Wilfrid Little and published by The Hymn Society in 2003.

#### 5. What were the biggest differences among British, American, Canadian and Australasian entries?

We hope that there are no significant differences between the entries on hymns from these parts of the world. Each of the editors has worked very hard to ensure that the coverage is complete and correct. The traditions of hymnody themselves, of course, determine to some extent what entries are required: there are very few entries referring to pre-1800 hymns in the Canadian and Australasian entries, whereas British hymnody was at its greatest in the eighteenth century. In addition, all European hymnody (though not exclusively European hymnody) depends to some extent on the Greek and Latin heritage. American hymnody is generally more recent, and the flourishing of many religious and cultural traditions in the USA has produced a magnificent variety of hymns from the immigrant communities and their churches. There are hymns in the Hispanic repertoire. Then there are the Gospel hymns and Revival hymns, and the songs of popular musicians. And one of the contributions to worship, which John Julian would never have thought of, is that of the African American slave songs, which are often so moving in their expression of suffering and their hope of glory.

#### 6. Which areas will need more attention in the future?

Almost all areas of the new dictionary will need to be continually revised and improved. We are under no illusion that we have provided the complete answer to every hymnological query, although the coverage of the major areas is very good. We think, however, that there is much work still to be done on Latin and German hymns.

In addition, there are parts of the world where we would like to know more about what is going on. The post-colonial age has allowed many countries to develop their own cultures, and this has had a major impact on contemporary worship in those places. As a result, there are new hymns in many languages and many countries, and we need to know more about them.

#### 7. What are the long-term plans for the CDH? Where do you see the CDH in 2020?

It ought to have more entries of the kind that are suggested in the response to the last question. We would like to see it as a truly global work of reference. Its features ought to include more illustrations, provided copyright problems can be overcome, and more musical examples. Quotations from actual texts should, we think, probably be increased.

Although many people, in Britain especially, have asked for a printed version of the CDH, it is hard to see this as a possibility in the immediate future. It would be

a huge undertaking and extremely expensive to purchase. Meanwhile, on-line publication has very many advantages, such as the ability to make additions and corrections.

The short answer to ‘where do we see the *CDH* in 2020?’ is that we see it as having attained a reputation as the most reliable, complete, and up-to-date guide to the whole topic of global hymnody. We would like to think that it will by then have become both familiar and indispensable.

#### 8. What are the biggest challenges facing researchers in hymnology?

Probably the biggest challenge is the size of the field in question, not only geographically, but temporally. Researchers will need to travel far and wide to establish what is happening in a specific country and how it relates to what has gone before.

There is also the absence, in many cases, of adequate information. Often the original manuscripts have been lost or destroyed, and some books are also very hard to come by. In spite of Julian’s *Dictionary*, the study of hymns is still way behind the study of other literary genres such as the epic or the lyric. There are reasons for this: library collections relating to hymns and hymnwriters are scattered all over the world, and are only now providing information about holdings and catalogues on-line.

#### 9. What else should we know about the *CDH*?

Probably the most important thing is to understand the scale of the achievement. But it is also important to recognize that this has not been achieved without serious financial support. A list of benefactors will be found on the title page. What that list does not give are the actual figures, which we do not propose to reveal in terms of individual donor institutions; but we wish to put on record that the sum raised in research grants is in the region of £175,000, somewhere around \$200,000+. We should add at this point that none of this money has been used to pay any of the editors, apart from the period when Dr Hornby was employed as an assistant from 2003 to 2005.

But there is more to be done, and this is a continuing enterprise. What is urgently needed is some continuing financial assistance. The *CDH* requires an organization or an individual who would sponsor it for the next five or ten years, and we appeal to your readers to find us one, or point us in the direction of how to apply to one, or more than one. There are young scholars waiting to take an active part in the continuation of this work, even as there are older scholars who must soon, in the nature of things, lay their burden down. It would require a relatively small sum to ensure that this great work can be carried on: enough to pay someone part-time to oversee its development and ensure its future.

The Editors

## Conclusion

For this researcher, it has been interesting to see the development of open-access resources and new paid resources such as the *CDH* over the past several years because the sustainability of both open-access and paid databases is an ongoing question. How can users or sponsors provide the support that is needed to maintain open access, and what services or materials are users willing to pay for? Models of sustainability can be difficult to find without turning towards subscription models that could dampen the level of usage.

Nevertheless, more and more peer-reviewed publications are now openly accessible on sites such as HathiTrust or institutional digital repositories. While this method of dissemination of research grows, it is of course still true that institutions and individuals pay considerable sums for access to peer-reviewed publications. It should not be ignored, however, that sites such as Wikipedia offer some hymn-related information, which, while usually anonymous and less than complete, do often at least point the user towards other, more scholarly sources. The *CDH* will need to compete in an age that is tilted towards the convenience of lesser materials and the beginning stages of free access to more scholarly materials.


Naturally, the depth and breadth of topical and historical coverage are among the *CDH*’s greatest of its considerable strengths. The *CDH* is also attractive for its ease of use and simple method for narrowing down searches, although its ranking of results is sometimes a puzzlement: a keyword search for *Australia* lists nine individuals before showing the *Australian hymnody* entry. Overall, though, the category tags and related articles attached to each entry make browsing a pleasure and research easier for the scholar, although there are few avenues for more advanced searching.

There are also seven major categories to browse: general, people, places, collections, hymns, eras, and traditions. Most of these are self-explanatory, although within the “people” category the names are in order by first name, instead of the traditional organization by last name, which makes browsing a little more challenging. The “collections” category also seems to combine the use of the term “collection” to mean a hymnal or other monograph with the other meaning of a hymnal collection in a library; this category also includes some general histories of hymnody. The “traditions” category is both comprehensive and surprisingly specific at times; most major denominational categories are listed here (Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, etc.), which makes the separate listings for Bohemian Brethren and Plymouth Brethren appear a little disproportionate. On the other side, there is no general category for the Anabaptist traditions, and one must know Canadian denominational history to know where to find the United Church of Canada, unless you simply go to the “places” category instead. The “hymns” category highlights the need for including more



research on “hymns in other languages” with currently just 17 entries with this designation. Overall, a choice for relevance ranking instead of only alphabetical ranking would be a welcome enhancement within each category, although the filters do help considerably.

The hymnological world is far richer with the availability of the *Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*. Compared with other online hymnological tools, it complements the data available in The Hymn Tune Index and Hymnary.org very well, by adding much-needed context to the information about the contents of hymnals.

The CDH is without question a landmark achievement in the field and deserving of support from educational and cultural institutions as well as its everyday users. As it expands to cover more and more hymnic traditions of the world, its global importance will only increase, as will the support necessary to maintain this invaluable resource. We, as institutions and individuals, should make every effort to help sustain our modern Julian; one hundred years from now, when others take on this hymnological task, they'll be glad we did. 

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>HathiTrust. *Our Partnership*. Retrieved from <http://www.hathitrust.org/partnership>.

<sup>2</sup>The launch itself is covered in these articles: J. R. Watson, “The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology,” *Bulletin of The Hymn Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 20, no. 9 (Winter 2014): 319-326; Timothy Dudley-Smith, “Sermon to conclude the conference at the on-line launch of the Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology, St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, Evening Prayer, 20 October 2013,” *Bulletin of The Hymn Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 20, no. 9 (Winter 2014): 327-331.

<sup>3</sup>Wim Kloppenburg, “The public launch of an ‘impossible task’,” *Muziek & Liturgie: Tijdschrift Van De Koninklijke Vereniging Van Organisten En Kerkmusici* 82, no. 6 (Dec. 2013): 39-40; Erik W. Goldstrom, review of “The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology,” *The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians* 23 (Jan 2014): 15-16; Paul Westermeyer, review of “Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology,” *Pastoral Music*, 38, no.3 (Mar 2014): 42-44; M. D. Jenkins, II, review of “Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology,” *Choice Magazine* (May 2014), doi: 10.5860/CHOICE.51-4763.




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